

ROUTLEDGE



RADIO'S NEW WAVE

Global Sound in the Digital Era

Edited by Jason Loviglio and
Michele Hilmes

First published 2013
by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Simultaneously published in the UK
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

© 2013 Taylor & Francis

The right of the editors to be identified as the authors of the editorial material, and of the authors for their individual chapters, has been asserted in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Trademark notice: Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Radio's new wave : global sound in the digital era / edited by Jason Loviglio and Michele Hilmes.
pages cm
Includes bibliographical references and index.
1. Radio broadcasting. 2. Digital communications. 3. Web 2.0. I. Loviglio, Jason, editor of compilation. II. Hilmes, Michele, 1953– editor of compilation.
HE8694.R25 2013
384.54—dc23
2012048873

ISBN: 978-0-415-50975-6 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-0-415-50976-3 (pbk)
ISBN: 978-0-203-12467-3 (ebk)

Typeset in Bembo and Stone Sans
by EvS Communication Networx, Inc.

Printed and bound in the United States of America by Publishers Graphics,
LLC on sustainably sourced paper.

To the unsung radio artists of the past, who may at last achieve
recognition in the digital present. And to today's sound artists
who are making radio's new wave.

1

LISTENING IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Kate Lacey

Radio in the digital age is arguably becoming more prolific, more fragmented, more manipulable, more mobile, more global, more personal. It is carried on a wider range of platforms and is less differentiated from other media than it seemed to be in the analogue age. But through all these contradictory and complex changes, and across all the variety of formats, one of the key threads of continuity that sustains the definition of radio is the construction of a dispersed and privatized public through the act of listening. The act of listening itself, however, is rarely problematized. And yet listening, as a cultural practice, is also subject to change and re-definition. This means that we do not just listen differently in different times and places, but that the way in which listening is experienced, and how it is configured and valorized as an activity in the public sphere is historically contingent. Listening is not changed *by* media technologies, but it does change *in relation* to changing technological constellations. And so the question arises about how to make sense of the continuities and changes in listening as radio rides its latest wave.

When digital radio was first mooted as a commercial prospect in the 1990s, it was sold on the promise of "superior sound" and "compact disc clarity" that would provide a new and improved listening experience.¹ Digital signal processing would eliminate the static, hiss, pops, and fades associated with analogue radio. Another selling point was the possibility for "mere" sound to be accompanied by text or pictures. However, the dominant practice of listening to radio while doing other things—like driving or housework—ensured, as the editor of BBC digital radio, Steve Mulholland, put it in 1997, that "while the visual can underpin or embellish audio, it must never detract from it."² Alongside claims for improved quality in transmission and enhanced delivery of information, came claims for increased quantity of provision. The digital delivery

system would overcome the limitations of spectrum scarcity, and promised a "revolution" in access to the airwaves that would democratize them and see a rise in the diversity and creativity of radio programming, whether commercially or community orientated.³ The most recent developments in "hybrid radio" are still being promoted in similarly confident terms. The RadioDNS project, a collaboration across public service and commercial broadcasters and associations that was launched in 2010 to more closely connect broadcast radio and the internet, simply declares its open technology to be "enhancing the listener experience, and making radio better."⁴

Promises of perfected sound and aspirations for a technologically reinvigorated democracy also accompanied the emergence of analogue recording and radio transmission into the public sphere in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and have tended to characterize each subsequent generation of hardware.⁵ The early market leader in delivering online radio streaming in the mid-1990s, for example, in calling itself "RealAudio," put a marker down about the sound quality and realism of its transmissions,⁶ despite the fact that dial-up connections and limited bandwidth often meant poorer audio quality than on-air reception by most conventional measures. Meanwhile, reports of one of the earliest internet radio stations, reveling in a name that belied its expectations to make a global impact—"Radio Technology for Mankind"—emphasized the expectation that "the data stream" would provide immediate, indiscriminate, and perpetual access to public performances in political and cultural life:

[P]erformances at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, speeches and debate from the floors of the House and Senate, broadcasts of luncheon speeches from the National Press Club, recordings of famous authors reading their works as well as the internet subscribers' favorite radio talk show, "Geek of the Week."⁷

Intriguingly, this ambitious list is remarkably similar to the one provided by Thomas Edison to the *Scientific American* in 1877, when forecasting the uses to which his newly invented phonograph could be put:

[F]or taking dictation, for taking testimony in court, for reporting speeches, for the reproduction of vocal music, for teaching languages [...] for correspondence, for civil and military orders [...] for the distribution of the songs of great singers, sermons and speeches, the words of great men and women.⁸

A similarly rich and ambitious menu was also widely predicted by the pioneers of the early radio industry. The Marconi Company, as just one example, was reported in 1922 to be hoping to popularize its "wireless telephone" in London by broadcasting "music, speeches and news of various kinds [...]"

weather forecasts [...] sermons by eminent ecclesiastics [...] important electioneering speeches and [...] fairy tales for the children to listen to when they are going to bed."⁹

But more than just recording and redistributing public and creative events, the novelty of these first internet radio stations was seen to lie in a new level of interactivity, with listeners able "to retrieve biographical data about the speakers and send them comments by electronic mail." In addition, all these online "broadcasts" could be "transmitted globally, stored, searched, and augmented with text and picture files. The station's creator, Carl Malamud, hoped that this new, accessible archive would be a useful tool in holding those in public office to account: "Imagine, they wouldn't be able to say, 'No, I never said that,' because it's all recorded."¹⁰ Here at the very beginning of the internet radio revolution, we once again see familiar tropes from earlier rounds of technological innovation: the collapse of time and space through mediation, the dream of a universal archive reproducing and recalling lived experience in all its plenitude, the immediacy of face-to-face communication achieved through mediated form, the collapse of barriers to share in the central concerns of the life of the nation, the fantasy of a comprehensive surveillance system applied in the service of accountability and public scrutiny.

The persistence of all these hopes for *true* communion and community through communication is fascinating, but it would be a mistake to think that there is nothing new, or that there are not newly urgent questions that arise with each new incarnation of the debates.¹¹ By the same token, however, to get caught up in each new moment without a sense of what went before, is to run the risk of missing the bigger picture. Listening in the digital age needs to be understood in the context of an ongoing "re-sounding" of the public sphere that began with the revolutionary recording and radio technologies of the late nineteenth century.¹²

The recurrence of claims to realism in the transparency and "fidelity" of recording and transmission techniques going right back to the earliest days of phonography and wireless broadcasting, are symptomatic of a newly constituted listening public learning to have *faith* in the ability of these radical new forms of mediation to afford a reliable representation of and access to "the real." The indiscriminacy of the microphone in picking up all sounds within its range, and the indiscriminacy of the radio transmitter in transgressing national and social boundaries produced new requirements on the listener to be discriminating in their listening, and to find new ways to accommodate listening practices and everyday routines to the new sonic landscape. The liveness and domestication of radio demanded a new sensibility that could recognize and accept the personalization of the institutional address as both intimate and impersonal in the same moment. In other words, a public mode of listening had to be learned and developed in private space. All these techniques of listening

have long since been naturalized, but they are, nevertheless, techniques that had to be constructed and appropriated over time.

Certainly the first wave of audio technologies—the telegraph, telephone, phonograph, and radio—did represent a radical transformation of the conditions of auditory perception, but centuries earlier it had been writing that was really the first media technology to enable the acoustic and temporal limits of public space to be extended; and the phonetic alphabet that was the first system of “recording” or at least representing, the sounds of speech. However, it was the widespread application of print technology in the modern era that allowed for the irresistible “de-auralisation” of public life.¹³ The constitution of the modern public sphere was achieved through the development of an “audience-oriented” subjectivity¹⁴ through the act of (mostly silent) reading, and the representation of the public back to itself as an imagined community, abstracted and disembodied. The authority and logic of the written word combined with the hegemony of “Cartesian perspectivalism”¹⁵ to privilege the eye over the ear, and to render the experience of mediated public life if not an entirely silent, at least a significantly muted, affair. Moreover, it represented a shift from the group-oriented intersubjectivity of the audience to the interiorized subjectivity of the individual reader.¹⁶

The possibility of recording and transmitting sound certainly accelerated the experience of time and space compression, afforded new forms of mediated interactivity, new kinds of data storage, new levels of mimetic realism. These new forms of representation and new communicative contexts developed in relation to new ways of listening, and enabled new ways of commodifying the act of listening. But, more significantly than any of this, the new sound media involved, gradually, but insistently, the accommodation of a *listening* public alongside, if not quite in place of, a *reading* public.

There *is* no public, in the modern sense, outside of representation. The modern public, forged in the age of print, had encountered itself through the disembodied and alphabeticized word.¹⁷ The restoration to the public realm of representation of the sounds of the human voice—with all its traces of embodied particularity, its emotional inflections, its intimate immediacy—therefore signaled a radical shift in terms of the access to, and experience of, public discourse. However, what this shift might mean for public life was bitterly contested. Although it is rarely acknowledged in this way, many of the debates through the twentieth century about whether these new “mass” media of communication were a force for democratization or for standardization and control hang on the extent to which *listening* was acknowledged as a critical activity like reading, or was associated simply with passive and uncritical reception.

The appropriation of the term “audience” rather than “public” in relation to audiovisual media is telling in this regard. “Audience,” with its etymological roots in the act of listening plain to see (though almost always overlooked) and carrying with it the image of an embodied collectivity of listeners (though

almost always thought of as spectators), is generally located in the realm of consumption, entertainment, and passivity. It is commonly opposed to the idea of “the public,” associated with critical activity of individuals *producing* and participating in political and public culture. This in turn is tied up with the idea that political agency is measured in terms of “voice”—in terms, that is, of speaking up, casting votes, being heard. The agency involved in *listening* to voices in the public sphere meanwhile is, more often than not, entirely ignored. Even when listening *is* considered as an activity in modern mediated culture, it is almost exclusively in terms of listening *in* to particular voices, genres, or programs. This is true not only of broadcasting and commercial organizations with an interest in ascertaining the size, reach, and reactions of the audience listening to (or “consuming”) particular outputs, but also of academic research interested in describing and analyzing the active audiences and their negotiation of the meanings of specific texts.

This (re-)invention of the listening public is part of what McLuhan identified as the shift from the linear visual logic associated with the age of print to the experiential acoustic logic of the electronic age.¹⁸ If the former was associated with rationality, objectivity, abstraction, linearity, individualism, and nationalism, the latter is associated with partiality, involvement, experience, simultaneity, collectivity, and globalism. The characteristic impact of the electronic age is in treating the eye as an ear, offering immersive, mythic, and networked communication. If acoustic metaphors resonate through discussions of electronic and digital culture, then “listening” rather than “reading” might seem the appropriate term to encapsulate engagement with digital and electronic “texts.” For example, in its immediacy, informality, and interactivity, a digital form like tweeting aspires to the conditions of talk or chat, and makes the condition of permanent and pervasive receptivity more like listening than reading, a listening out for connection to the world.

Listening is a rich concept for histories and theories of communication, bringing together as it does notions of embodiment, intersubjectivity, liveness, and sensory perception with notions of an active and critical disposition. With the dominance of the written and printed text, we have become accustomed to the idea of “reading” all sorts of non-literary texts. But in the digital age, when the very idea of a stable and finite text is increasingly problematic, and when multimedia texts call on more embodied and immersive modes of perception, “listening” becomes a more appropriate term than “reading” for engagement with all media in the age of convergence, not just those that deal exclusively in sound. Thinking through the question of listening to radio in the digital age, then, might have implications beyond radio itself.

Before returning to a discussion of listening to digital radio specifically, there is, first, an important distinction to be made between “listening in” and “listening out.” While both “administrative” and “critical” audience research has been concerned primarily with the act of listening *in* to particular texts in

particular contexts, it is also possible to listen *out* in a way that is not tied to or pre-determined by particular texts or voices. This is a kind of anticipatory disposition that is defined by openness. In other words, it is a *public* disposition, attentive to, but not determined by what is being listened to. The indiscriminacy of "listening out" is, in fact, the necessary corollary of the indiscriminacy of public address. Herein lies the political agency and ethical responsibility of listening—for without a listening public there would be no *call* to find a public voice. Moreover, without a listening public open to give those voices a "hearing," there can be no guarantee of the plurality of voices or the exercise of the freedom of speech.

"Listening out" in this sense need not be a critical disposition in relation to acoustic representation only (in much the same way as we no longer regard "reading" as a critical activity restricted to the written word). However, this conceptualization of listening does provide some insight into debates about radio's "new wave," particularly in relation to the politics and ethics of listening in relation to the new forms of digital radio. The implications can be seen particularly acutely in relation to the prolific output out of contemporary digital culture.

By 1998, when websites like the BRS radio directory were already acting as portals to thousands of online radio stations (both terrestrial re-broadcasts and dedicated online radio),¹⁹ the first generation of customizable radio stations was being reported. Imagine Radio, for example, allowed listeners to "become their own disk jockeys" by selecting and rating tracks from a series of formatted stations. The stations that resulted could, in turn, be "shared."²⁰ Some claimed that these "stations" were more like online CD jukeboxes, and so hybrid forms began to emerge, such as Puremix, that allowed for listeners to choose a preferred mix from a wide range of streamed music channels, but interspersed with familiar broadcast elements like disc jockey talk and news on the hour.²¹ Around the same time, software like Winamp and Shoutcast or RealSever Basic 8, was becoming more widely available, enabling people not only to personalize radio stations, but to re-broadcast them to friends and develop a listening network.²² Peercasting took this a step further, with every listener in a decentralized file-sharing network also becoming a broadcaster, a trend that became more "mainstream" with the take-up of "podcasting."²³

Although the most prominent of these developments in personalization and networking centered on music, there were developments in talk radio and other formats too. Audible was one of the first providers of downloadable speech audio files, and remains one of the largest. In 2008 it was bought by Amazon, and is now the leading online provider of audiobooks and other speech-based material. Interestingly, its promotional gambit is "to establish literate listening as a core tool for anyone seeking to be more productive, better informed, or more thoughtfully entertained."²⁴ The BBC even experimented with personalized radio drama in 2001, producing a half-hour play with some

94 billion narrative routes. Taking as its theme Einstein's theory that God does not play dice with the Universe, Nick Fisher's *Wheel of Fortune* was made up of twenty-three minute long segments each ending in a narrative junction affording the listener three options about how to continue listening.²⁵ More recently, there have been experiments to emulate the microblogging phenomenon of sites like Twitter with spoken word versions like Audioboo, an audioblogging platform that offers mobile, locative, and interactive audio file sharing, because, as their tagline has it, "sound is social."²⁶ These new sites, like the leading social sound sharing app "SoundCloud," allow people not only to record and "share sound with the world," but to *track* the numbers and location of people listening around the globe.²⁷

The trend to personalized and networked listening took another turn with the arrival of stations like Last.fm that use a combination of audio fingerprinting and collaborative filtering to enable the station to "learn" about an individual listener's musical tastes and so tailor a playlist to suit not only the listener, but also the record labels for whom such sites provide valuable market research.²⁸ Pandora radio, floated for \$2.6 billion in 2011,²⁹ goes even further, based on its claim to a "scientific" analysis of musical tastes and preferences with its "musical genome project" that plays music listeners' requests "and more music like it."³⁰ In 2008, the "smart radio" application "Stitcher" set out to do the same for news and information, aggregating content from various newsfeeds and podcasts according to previous choices and settings.³¹ Sites like these claim to be "discovery" services—although the implication is always that listeners can be reassured that their discoveries will be safely within the realm of the familiar.

Again, there are precedents in the analogue age. Radio caused genre-specific stations and formats to proliferate long before television followed suit in moving away from "mixed programming." This sort of specialization and audience fragmentation was "sold" on the promise of increased choice, though Andrew Crisell was one of many critics who judged the choice involved in such listening decisions to be "an often timid, conservative faculty."³² Similarly, Susan Douglas identified a tendency in format radio to cultivate and pander to "a safe, gated-in listening."³³ Even earlier, Horkheimer and Adorno had located "the regression of the masses" in "their inability to hear the unheard of with their own ears" because of the way in which the culture industry offered up only pre-digested fare.³⁴ And, indeed, this pessimism about the lack of courage or wherewithal to escape the comfort zone of conformity and deference was already part of Kant's famous answer to the question "What is Enlightenment?"³⁵ In other words, the latest constellation of institutional, psychological, and algorithmic mechanisms that are in play to direct listeners to familiar, homely sites are not evidence in themselves for a narrative of decline from some past age of cosmopolitan listening.

Nevertheless, the contemporary developments in digital radio—personalization, networking and specialization—represent arguably heightened forms of

privatization of the public potential of listening, working to reproduce a model of "listening in" to more of the same, more of what is already familiar, rather than "listening out." These new textual and algorithmic strategies combine with quite familiar psychological and pragmatic strategies on the part of the listener to develop convenient and manageable (and often quite limited) "repertoires" of listening in amid the global cacophony. This generally conservative application of a radical new technological potential is compounded by the fact that there is a good deal of re-circulation of content within and between sites, so that the apparent proliferation still condenses around familiar central distributors.³⁶ The flipside of this, is that the dispersed and disaggregated audience, for all the talk of personalization and fragmentation, might then still be sharing in some sort of common culture and conversation, especially with the way rankings, recommendations, hit-rates, and advertising direct listeners towards a concentration of popular, trusted, or fashionable sites, followed by the "long tail" of more niche options—albeit these niches in aggregate are emerging as a bigger market than the "mainstream."³⁷ Personalized and social sound media are not separate from the mainstream, for they share in, comment on, or reproduce more conventionally mainstream sources of news, music, and other material, while the mainstream in its turn picks up, reproduces, and comments on what is "trending" in the social media.³⁸

Nevertheless, a focus on the new forms of "listening in" often leads to celebratory analyses of the proliferation of platforms, the profusion of personalized stations, the convergence with other media forms, the possibility for listeners to produce, share, comment on, and manipulate media materials, and the convenience of listening on mobile devices which "produces" new forms of encounter. This is connected to the longstanding cultural bias which privileges the productive activity of "speaking up" over the receptive "passivity" of listening. In other words, the proliferation of forms and formats for individual expression is assumed to be coterminous with a plurality of voices, which in turn is taken to be the marker of a properly functioning communicative democracy. The celebration of interactivity in the digital age is, in these terms, a celebration of the opportunities for listeners to do more than "just" listen.

This is nowhere clearer than in the way in which the conventional divide between broadcaster and listener is being re-described. There are various portal sites for internet talk radio, many of which use a version of YouTube's famous tagline, "Broadcast Yourself." Countless websites claim to be able to make an individual voice (or an individual's choices) heard by millions, holding out the promise to their users that they will be able to "Talk to the World."³⁹ Apart from the question about whether there is really such a large and willing audience for these individualized soundbites, there is an odd contradiction at play here as it speaks to the desire both for a decentralization of broadcasting to the point where every individual has a voice, and at the same time to the desire for each individual voice to be precisely at the center of a network of millions. The

rhetoric of decentralization in other words openly mobilizes narcissistic fantasies of propagandistic power in a radical move that at the same time promises to strip broadcasting of its heritage as some sort of collective endeavor.

Participants in personalized radio stations are generally invited to categorize their speaking or listening into generic types, such as sports, lifestyle, comedy, and so on. As far as politics is concerned, these genres might be further disaggregated with labels such as "liberal," "conservative," or "libertarian," or be even more precisely distinguished by issue, event, or even individual electoral candidate.⁴⁰ The interpretation of this degree of genrification is ambivalent. On the one hand, it can be read as a symptom and reinforcement of social and political fragmentation or even polarization. On the other it could potentially encourage users to dip into forms of radio and types of opinion which are new, unfamiliar, or anathema to them. To this extent, there is a surprising echo here of an ambivalence in the approach of the early BBC in an era of monopoly rather than proliferation, and where broadcasting was unequivocally understood as a public, rather than a consumer good. On the one hand, the Reithian ideal was to have mixed programming on a single service in order to allow listeners to be surprised—and enlightened—by encountering ideas and voices to which they might not otherwise have chosen to listen. People, in other words, were invited to listen out for the unexpected, to listen out for things that might challenge their preconceptions and widen their horizons. On the other hand, listeners were continually chided for listening "indiscriminately." "Proper," responsible listening was selective, intentional, concentrated, and critical. People, in other words, were invited to "listen in," on purpose and with purpose to a choice of programs. And yet within a framework of public service the two ideas are not entirely mutually exclusive: it is how the balance is struck between listening out and listening in that is the issue.⁴¹

This is because a proliferation of voices and sounds online is not in and of itself a sign of a well-functioning democratic public sphere, for not only does proliferation not equate straightforwardly to plurality, but it might also erode any sense of a collective public forum. Certainly critics have long expressed concerns about the fragmentation of the public into "sphericules" and isolated or entrenched media enclaves.⁴² These critiques tend to mourn the loss of a common public space of conversation, normally organized at a national level. There are several things to be said about this. First is that even the classical bourgeois public sphere was made up of multiple published interventions, not all of which were read by everybody. The narrative of decline from a shared common space can be read, then, either as a deep-set nostalgia for the lost shared acoustic space of the ancient city states (for which read "face-to-face" encounter) and a distrust of the politics of representation altogether; or it is a nostalgia for the shared national cultures aspired to by the national press and network broadcasting that have begun to occupy a less dominant space within the new media landscape. But to focus only on mediacentric explanations is to

overlook other potential explanations, such as the declining trust in conventional media and politics, and a wider withdrawal into the private sphere, or the generalized shift from broad class-based politics to identity or issue-based politics.

Second, concerns about the fragmentation of the public sphere tend to read a fragmentation of the (listening) public off a fragmentation of "the text." The logic of specialization that has characterized the history of radio since the days of the national networks to the current trend for customized stations is read as a specialization of the audience, and therefore of the public. But a public is not constituted in relation to particular texts, but rather, as Michael Warner has it, in the *reflexive circulation* of discourse, a "concatenation of texts through time."⁴³ In a multimedia universe, this concatenation of texts is put together by users travelling between sites and across platforms. In other words, the identification of increasingly specialized radio stations, for example, does not necessarily mean that listening can be mapped in the same way. An individual station might be closely circumscribed in various ways, but its listeners will rarely be tuning in only to that one site, and will identify not only as listeners but also as viewers, readers, users, and contributors. Indeed, recent empirical research of online audience activity confirms "overlapping patterns of public attention rather than isolated groups of audience loyalists."⁴⁴

Third, and perhaps more significantly, the fragmentation of the public sphere is less of a problem if plurality, rather than consensus, is taken as the guiding principle. In other words, it is not only the *number* of voices or contributions which matters, but the *variety* of voices and the variety of ways in which those voices are able to speak that matters—the possibility of both inter- and intra-discursive contestation, as Lincoln Dahlberg has put it.⁴⁵ This element matters because the power dynamics that privilege certain voices and ways of speaking offline are, of course, replicated online. And this is where the question of listening out becomes so important.

First of all it is only through listening out for difference that a plurality of voices can register—this is the role, in other words, of audition as audit. Freedom of expression is necessary, but not sufficient, to ensure plurality. The vagaries of (conditioned) individual choice and the conditions of the marketplace, as well as more direct instances of censorship and control, might lead to a multitude of similar voices, or the marginalization or silencing of certain other voices. It is only in listening out for difference that plurality can be identified and secured. This is reinforced by the idea that the "freedom of listening" is something that inheres in the communicative spaces *between* speakers, whereas the freedom of expression was historically conceptualized as an individual property right.⁴⁶ It is this privileging of the freedom of expression over the freedom of listening that is an important factor in the widespread celebration of new forms and platforms of expression and interactivity. And it is the extension of the idea of "expression" to include any form of contribution to the

production of content, rather than the content itself that lies behind Jodi Dean's blistering critique of the de-politicization of the public sphere under the contemporary conditions of communicative capitalism. She critiques the "fantasy of abundance" and the "fantasy of participation" in the digital age in order to account for the lack of political response despite all the apparent proliferation of debate.⁴⁷ In other words, the performance of participation is valued over everything else. To speak up is the thing, regardless of whether anyone is listening.

Secondly, there is also the question of whether there is a plurality not only of voice, but also of listening. In terms of radio, the proliferation of voices on air resonates within an increasingly privatized and personalized public sphere. The techniques of producing personalized programming and the rise of ear-phone culture together privilege listening as an intensely private, rather than a public activity. Indeed, in the digital age, there is a sense in which the act of listening is rendered increasingly obscure. The new "activity" of the listener in personalizing and intervening in the "production" of digital radio is most commonly conceptualized as actions in response to, or in advance of, the act of listening, not the act of listening itself. In an echo of the dominant formulations of the analogue age which (mis)conceived the listening public as a passive mass audience, the activity of listening, as a mode of active reception anterior to and separate from measurable *expressed* response is once again elided as audience activity is understood in terms of "speaking up" whether that be via posts to websites, preferences registered, personalized stations created, or comments tweeted. Moreover, listening in in this sense of online or digital activity is conveniently open to surveillance, measurement, and commodification by both corporations and digital savvy individuals.

The privatization of the act of listening has profound implications for the public sphere if we accept that communication is about both the production and distribution of content, *and* its reception and critique. An open, public listening position is critical at every level; not, as is commonly assumed, only at the level of reception. Listening out is a *productive* act, since it is generally only in the expectation of finding an audience that people are moved to express themselves at all. This is not unrelated to the description of the contemporary media age as an "attention economy," where producers of content compete in the media marketplace for the scarce and therefore valuable attention of an audience.⁴⁸ However, the economic frame privileges attention as listening in, an activity belonging to the private realm of consumption, and a "passive" sort of attention that can be easily swayed or caught (despite being clothed in the politicized rhetoric of "choice"). The idea of listening out, on the other hand, reserves a sense of responsibility and intentionality to the concept of "attention." It also, therefore, raises questions about the ethics of listening in the digital age.

To listen out for otherness, for plurality, can be conceived, therefore, as a civic obligation. Lisbeth Lipari has argued that ethics itself arises out of this difficult commitment to engage with difference, this "listening otherwise," as

she calls it, which involves, "a transcendence from self-in-separation to self-in-relation."⁴⁹ While Lipari is concerned with the private sphere, this obligation to listen otherwise intersects with a civic obligation in democratic societies to be well informed in order to form grounded opinions, deliberate well, and participate in public and political life. It is not for nothing that we speak of giving someone a fair "hearing." Similarly, Susan Bickford's conceptualization of "political listening" is about having the courage to listen to difference, neither refusing to listen, nor simply opposing or blithely accepting difference, but being open to and respectful of other voices.⁵⁰ Listening out in this sense is not about the search for consensus or conformity, let alone the confirmation of already given tastes and opinions. Nor is it about the erasure or disregard of conflict or different interests. It is, rather, about the need to *attend* to others and otherness and, as Chantal Mouffe puts it in her discussion of agonistic pluralism, how to ensure an adversary's right to express a contrary opinion is not negated, but *listened* to.⁵¹

The openness of listening out, then, is about keeping channels of communication open across ongoing difference and conflicting interests. It is, therefore, a difficult, challenging, and risk-laden responsibility at the best of times. It is arguably more of a challenge at the end of a broadcasting century in which the listening public has been persistently constructed as a commodified audience made up of self-interested individual consumers controlling privatized soundscapes and listening in to sounds targeted at particular demographics or communities of the like-minded. But at the same time it is precisely the experience of living in a media age that produces and heightens the requirement, the context, the responsibilities, and the possibilities of listening out.

Media ethics is generally considered a question of media production. The recent "ethical turn" in media studies has, significantly, acknowledged the importance of the ethics of reception.⁵² Though the recent innovations in digital radio raise important questions about the ethics of listening, they are not necessarily questions that can or will be answered at the level of media policy, institution, or text. Once upon a time the "civic ambition" of radio, whether commercial or public service, was expressed in terms of a certain kind of centralized programming and a certain idea of "proper" (undistracted and discriminate) listening in.⁵³ Radio in the digital age is radically de-centered and dispersed, and under these conditions it is increasingly necessary to detach the question of the ethics of listening from particular media productions and producers. Cultures of communication, after all, exceed the set of activities—productive and receptive—that cluster around particular media texts at particular moments. Listening out is a civic as much as a media practice. It is the practice of being open to the multiplicity of texts and voices and thinking of texts in the context of, and in relation to, difference, and how they resonate across time and in different spaces. Despite the increasing sophistication of techniques by search engines, advertising, and personal recommendations to attract listeners

to sites similar to those just visited, or to devise more or less familiar playlists, or to retreat into a personalized and privatized soundscape, a culture and practice of listening out would go a long way in protecting the digital environment as a place of wide horizons and diversity.

Notes

1. Andrew Pollack, "Next, Digital Radio for a Superior Sound," *New York Times*, July 11, 1990; Steve Crowley, "Bringing Radio Up to Date: New Digital Technology Can Sound as Clear as Compact Discs," *Washington Post*, June 3, 1990.
2. Quoted in Anne Karpf, "Value Added Services: Digital Radio May Have Set the Technofreaks Ablaze. But Does it Offer Anything for the Average Listener?" *The Guardian*, December 3, 1997.
3. Nigel Powell, "Tuning In for a Digital Revolution," *The Times*, February 19, 1998; Raymond Snoddy, "Africa Set to Go Radio Gaga," *The Times*, June 26, 1998; Stephen A. Booth, "Radio That Bytes," *Popular Science*, November 2000, n.p.
4. <http://radiodns.org/>. For discussions of contested definitions of radio in relation to its more recent technological incarnations, see, David A. Black, "Internet Radio: A Case Study in Medium Specificity" *Media, Culture and Society* 23, no. 3 (2001), 397–408; Chris Priestman, "Narrowcasting and the Dream of Radio's Great Global Conversation," *The Radio Journal: International Studies in Broadcast and Audio Media* 2, no. 2 (2004), 77–88; Kate Lacey, "Ten Years of Radio Studies. The Very Idea," *The Radio Journal: International Studies in Audio and Broadcast Media* 6, no. 1 (2008), 21–32; Ariana Moscote Freire, "Remediating Radio: Audio Streaming, Music Recommendation and the Discourse of Radioness," *The Radio Journal: International Studies in Audio and Broadcast Media* 5, no. 2/3 (2008), 97–112; Andrea Baker, "Comparing the Regulatory Models of Net-Radio with Traditional Radio," *International Journal of Emerging Technologies and Society* 7, no. 1 (2009), 1–14.
5. There have been, however, notable exceptions to this general trend, as standards of sound quality are defined not only by taste and technology, but also by the marketplace. Examples would include the "delay" in introducing radio on FM in the US because of objections from established AM stations and plans for FM television and the prioritizing of quantity over quality in relation to the commercial digital radio multiplexes currently operating in the UK. See Stephen Lax, "Digital Radio and the Diminution of the Public Sphere," in *Media and Public Spheres*, ed. Richard Butsch, 109–21 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 118. The widespread adoption of the "compressed" sound of mp3 players, along with other forms of miniaturization, is another example of the adoption of a "good enough" aesthetic.
6. Part of the Real Networks Corporation, based in Seattle. RealAudio was launched in 1995, followed by RealVideo and then RealPlayer. <http://www.realnetworks.com> (accessed August 6, 2012).
7. Peter H. Lewis, "Internet Radio Station Plans to Broadcast Around the Clock," *New York Times*, September 19, 1994.
8. Quoted in Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 78.
9. Mr. Godfrey Isaacs, managing director of the Marconi Company, quoted in "The New Wireless Era. Marconi Telephone Plans," *The Manchester Guardian* May 6, 1922, 9.
10. Lewis, "Internet Radio."
11. For the best discussion of the history of communication in these terms, see John Durham Peters, *Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).
12. This is the problematic I pursue at greater length in *Listening Publics: The Politics and Experience of Listening in the Media Age* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2013).

13. James Carey, "Walter Benjamin, Marshall McLuhan, and the Emergence of Visual Society," *Prospects* 11, no. 1 (1986), 29–38.
14. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 28–29.
15. Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 68.
16. Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (New York: Routledge, 1982).
17. The term "alphabeticized" here refers to the invention of the phonetic writing system (the first technology of sound recording, offering a graphical reproduction of the spoken word that could be sonically reproduced in being read aloud). See Ong's *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History* (1967; Global Publications: 2000), 87; <http://ssips.binghamton.edu>.
18. Marshall McLuhan, "Visual and Acoustic Space," in *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*, ed. Daniel Warner (New York: Continuum, 2006), 67–72.
19. BRS stands for Broadband Radio Service. The BRS Media company launched its online radio directory in 1995. As www.web-radio.fm it links to over 10,000 radio websites, and over 5,000 webcasting sites. <http://get.fm/about> (accessed August 6, 2012).
20. Rachel Lehmann-Haupt, "Internet Radio: Listeners Take On Role of the DeeJay," *New York Times*, November 5, 1998.
21. Sean Dodson, "Internet Thrilled the Radio Star: Sean Dodson Tunes In as the UK's First Ever Personalised Radio Hits the Airwaves," *Guardian Online*, November 16, 2000.
22. John Gilroy, "Online Broadcasting Up Close and Personal," *The Washington Post*, November 16, 2000.
23. Peter Rojas, "Pirates of Peercasting," *The Guardian*, July 25, 2002. The term "podcasting" has been attributed to *Guardian* journalist, Ben Hammersly, writing in 2004. See Richard Berry, "Will the iPod Kill the Radio Star? Profiling Podcasting as Radio," *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 12, no. 2 (2006), 143–62, 143.
24. Audible Press Centre <http://www.audible.co.uk/press-centre> (accessed March 17, 2012).
25. "Bets on for interactive drama," *BBC News Online*, September 19, 2001, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/tv_and_radio/1552369.stm (accessed February 20, 2012).
26. Audioboo.fm (accessed March 17, 2012).
27. <http://soundcloud.com/> (accessed March 17, 2012).
28. Dominic Timms, "The New Pioneers: Niche Stations Using Imagination and Innovation are Driving the Use of Online Radio," *The Guardian*, August 18, 2003.
29. "Online Radio Firm Pandora Floats for \$2.6bn in New York," *BBC News Online*, June 15, 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-13780371> (accessed February 20, 2012).
30. Pandora, "About the Music Genome Project," <http://www.pandora.com/about/mgp> (accessed March 27, 2012).
31. <http://stitcher.com> (accessed March 17, 2012).
32. Andrew Crisell, "Radio: Public Service, Commercialism and the Paradox of Choice," in *The Media: An Introduction*, ed. Adam Briggs and Paul Copley (Harlow, UK: Pearson Education 2002), 121–34, 121.
33. Susan J. Douglas, *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination* (London: Time, 1999), 348.
34. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung: Philosophische Fragmente* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1988), 42–43.
35. James Donald, "Kant, the Press, and the Public Use of Reason," *Javnost: The Public* 10, no. 2 (2003), 45–64, 48.
36. Tim Wall, "The Political Economy of Internet Radio" *The Radio Journal: International Studies in Audio and Broadcast Media* 2, no. 1 (2004), 27–44.
37. Chris Anderson, *The Long Tail: How Endless Choice is Creating Unlimited Demand* (London: Random House, 2010).
38. Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006); Pablo J. Boczkowski, *News At Work: Imitation in an Age of Information Abundance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).
39. Live 365 promises its subscribers that their personal stations will be "immediately available to millions of listeners," <http://www.live365.com>; "Talk to the World" is the tagline of the Sproker audio platform, <http://www.sproker.com> (accessed March 17, 2012).
40. See, for example, the search options on the Tunein website, <http://tunein.com/radio/Talk-c424725/> (accessed March 17, 2012).
41. This was a recurring debate in other radio systems, including the American radio of the 1930s, as David Goodman has discussed fully in *Radio's Civic Ambition: American Broadcasting and Democracy in the 1930s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).
42. Elihu Katz, "And Deliver Us From Segmentation," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 546, no. 1 (1996), 22–33; Todd Gitlin, "Public Sphere or Public Spheri-cules?" in *Media, Ritual and Identity*, ed. Tamar Liebes and James Curran (London: Routledge, 1998), 168–74; Cass Sunstein, *Republic.com* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); Scott W. Campbell and Nojin Kwak, "Mobile Communication and Strong Network Ties: Shrinking or Expanding Spheres of Public Discourse?" *New Media and Society* 14, no. 2 (2012), 262–80.
43. Michael Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics" *Public Culture* 14, no. 1 (2002), 49–90, 62.
44. James G. Webster and Thomas B. Ksiazek, "The Dynamics of Audience Fragmentation: Public Attention in an Age of Digital Media," *Journal of Communication* 62, no. 1 (2012), 39–56.
45. Lincoln Dahlberg, "Rethinking the Fragmentation of the Cyberpublic: From Consensus to Contestation," *New Media and Society* 9, no. 5 (2007), 827–47.
46. Kate Lacey, "Listening Overlooked: An Audit of Listening as a Category in the Public Sphere," *Javnost: The Public* 18, no. 4 (2011), 5–20.
47. Jodi Dean, "Communicative Capitalism: Circulation and the Foreclosure of Politics," *Cultural Politics* 1, no.1 (2005), 51–74.
48. Thomas H. Davenport and John C. Beck, *The Attention Economy: Understanding the New Currency of Business* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 2001); Patrick Crogan and Samuel Kinsley, eds., "Special Issue: Paying Attention," *Culture Machine* 13 (2012).
49. Lisbeth Lipari, "Listening Otherwise: The Voice of Ethics," *International Journal of Listening* 23, no. 1 (2009), 44–59, 45, 53.
50. Susan Bickford, *The Dissonance of Democracy: Listening, Conflict, and Citizenship* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996).
51. Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso, 2000), 80–107.
52. Roger Silverstone, *Media and Morality: On the Rise of the Mediapolis* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2006); Nick Couldry, *Listening Beyond the Echoes: Media, Ethics and Agency in an Uncertain World* (London: Paradigm, 2006); Jonathan C. Ong, "Where is the Cosmopolitan? Locating Cosmopolitanism in Media and Cultural Studies," *Media, Culture and Society* 31, no. 3 (2009), 449–66.
53. Goodman, *Radio's Civic Ambition*.